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Viewing cable 09MUSCAT1037, OMAN: DIM PROSPECTS FOR RADIO SAWA

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09MUSCAT1037**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09MUSCAT1037	2009-11-23 11:50	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Muscat

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article4025306.ece>

VZCZCXR05731
RR RUEHDE
DE RUEHMS #1037/01 3271151
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FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0988
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 001037

SIPDIS
FOR NEA/ARP (AMACDONALD), NEA/PPD (DBENZE)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/22
TAGS: [BBG](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: OMAN: DIM PROSPECTS FOR RADIO SAWA

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard J. Schmierer, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In recent months, Embassy Muscat has worked, in formal meetings and behind the scenes, to discern current Omani thinking on the possibility of Radio Sawa being permitted to broadcast on the Sultanate's FM spectrum. Most recently, the Ambassador's first call on the Minister of Information provided what is likely as decisive (albeit not encouraging) a response as will be given. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Oman's radio scene consists of four government-owned

stations, one in English and three in Arabic, alongside two private Arabic stations and one in English. The slow development of radio is part and parcel of the Sultanate's highly cautious and thoroughly controlled approach to media and information in general. Radio Sawa was first raised as a possibility for Oman as early as 2002. Strategizing within the Embassy and with Washington at that time indicated that efforts were best directed toward cooperation with a private partner, a decision meant to clarify the station's status as an editorially independent entity as well as to take advantage of impending broadcast liberalization (measures which seemed imminent as early as 2003, but which did not come into effect until 2007). Since then, the private partner with which the BBG were working moved forward optimistically, even stating within the past year that Omani authorities were nearly ready to complete an agreement to license Sawa for FM broadcasting - a situation sharply at odds with all signs observed from within the bureaucracy.

¶3. (C) A renewed series of working-level and unofficial exchanges with Ministry of Information staff starting earlier this year began to clarify the Omani position. The private option pursued to that time, sources opined, was - whatever encouragement previously given to the private partner involved - unworkable, given the Ministry's interpretation of the part of the broadcast law that prohibits foreign ownership of the media. Sawa would also challenge the Omani practice of strictly separating Arabic and English content (which prevents Arabic-language stations from broadcasting Western pop music and even makes it impossible for English-language stations to host Arabic-speaking guests whose remarks are translated on air). The example of the BBC World Service should not be considered a precedent, they added, because arrangements in some form with the BBC are of such long standing as to predate not only current broadcast laws but the current reign and are therefore considered unique. (NOTE: The BBC broadcasts from a medium-wave transmitter on land obtained via long-term lease. This allows the World Service to transmit on a limited basis on local AM, with programming in English, Tagalog, and other languages as well as Arabic. The weakness of the signal, combined with the infrequent and inconveniently timed Arabic service, gives the World Service a minuscule local audience. END NOTE)

¶4. (C) During his introductory call on Minister of Information Hamad bin Mohammed al-Rashdi in late October, the Ambassador raised the question of Radio Sawa, an issue with which the Minister was clearly familiar. Speaking as frankly as Omani hospitality permits, the Minister made it clear that it was unlikely that Sawa would find a way to broadcast in Oman. However, he noted, the chief concern is not content, but precedent: that once one nation's station was on the air, Oman's rigorously equitable foreign policy would require that similar requests from others be granted. He added that any decision regarding Sawa was one that would involve not just the Ministry, but consent from "across the government," an indication of royal and security concerns on the issue. Asked whether he would find it useful to meet with BBG leadership or Sawa staff to discuss what way forward might still be possible, he replied with an open-ended "Well, they could come...", the unspoken half of which began with a definite "but."

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The Minister's comments on precedent undoubtedly explain at least in part Oman's reluctance to continue discussing Radio Sawa, squarely with the Sultanate's strong and consistent efforts to combat extremism. Indeed, what concerns Oman is not specifically Radio Sawa, but the prospect of having to host stations from Iran, Saudi Arabia, or other "brotherly nations," the content of which could prove considerably less palatable than Sawa's. In tandem with Oman's pervasive interest in controlling, wherever possible, the information available to Omani citizens (which continues to hamper the future development of private radio in general), these concerns likely render further attempts to find a broadcast home for Radio Sawa in Oman ineffectual for the foreseeable future. END COMMENT.

Schmierer